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## Horseheath Hall revisited

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### Introduction

Volume XLI (1948) of the *Proceedings of Cambridge Antiquarian Society* contains a paper on 'Horseheath Hall and its Owners' by the Horseheath antiquarian, Catherine Parsons. This has become the standard work on the subject and remains the most comprehensive. Catherine Parsons (1870–1956), like her contemporary and friend, Dr William Palmer, was a true antiquarian. She was interested in collecting, recording and disseminating information about anything and everything relating to the past – from oral reminiscences and local folklore (her work on witchcraft is still much quoted) to producing a detailed, scholarly history of Horseheath church and to supervising an archaeological excavation of Roman remains. She was a leading campaigner for the establishment of Cambridge & County Folk Museum and became its first honorary curator, donating many items, while she left her remarkable collection of some two thousand keys, many from Cambridgeshire, to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Catherine Parsons was meticulous in her work and thorough in her research, as her six boxes of papers now in Cambridgeshire Archives testify: there are fourteen notebooks on Horseheath alone. However, in the sixty or so years since her paper was published more sources have become available and accessible; some archaeological investigations have taken place on the site, while new research, disciplines and methodologies have enhanced understanding of both the subject and its

historical context. The time seems right to bring all these together and to 'revisit' Horseheath Hall.

Catherine Parsons covered the two phases of the Hall – both the 'old' Hall and its seventeenth-century replacement. Regrettably, nothing new has come to light about the site of the former. Its existence is not in doubt; it was well documented and Elizabeth I spent at least one night there on the return leg of her progress to Norwich in 1578, but its actual location is still unknown. Catherine Parsons thought that the new Hall possibly replaced the old but no medieval material was found in the area during the archaeological work undertaken prior to the site being re-landscaped in the 1990s (Cocroft 1999, 112). It seems more likely that the old Hall was nearer to Horseheath village, where a number of possible sites await further investigation. Therefore, this article will concentrate on the new Hall which was built between 1663 and 1666 for William, 3rd Lord Alington (Catherine Parsons spelt this with one 'l' so that is the form used here) and was one of the most important country houses in Cambridgeshire.

### The Alington family

The Alington family was what would be called today upwardly mobile. The first mention of an Alington owning land in Horseheath was in 1397 when it was apparently acquired through a marriage alliance. This was to be a continual theme over the next three centuries as family members continued to make advantageous marriages, increasing not only their land and property holdings, particularly in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Suffolk, but also their social status. They were particularly adept at accommodating the power struggles and religious upheavals of the times and in this they may well have been supported by the scale and breadth of the familial networks that they had built up. They did not generally move in the highest court circles but always seem to have been involved in affairs of state, served as Members of Parliament and held some office in lower levels of government, both locally and nationally.

Edward Hailstone, writing in 1873 about the

Alington connection with Bottisham, found that early pedigrees of the family were 'in such hopeless confusion, that it becomes impossible to speak with certainty ...' (Hailstone 1873, 109). Catherine Parsons pointed out the difficulty in distinguishing between several generations named William but more recent work has been helpful and it would now seem that the Alington family originally came to Cambridgeshire from Cornwall (Woodger & Roskell 1993). William Alington (d. 1446) arrived at the court of Richard II in the retinue of the king's half-brother, the Earl of Huntingdon, and appears to have seamlessly switched allegiance to Henry IV on Richard's deposition. The first mention of a Hall at Horseheath appears in the will of this William. In 1449, his son, also William (d. 1459), was given a licence by Henry VI to enclose 320 acres there for a park. However, the next two generations were to be found serving the Yorkist cause with the William of the time dying at Bosworth in 1485 in support of Richard III.

There were seemingly no problems in subsequently adapting to the Tudor dynasty. The next Alington, Giles (d. 1522), served at the court of Henry VIII, participating at the coronations of Henry and Katherine of Aragon while his son and heir, also Giles (1499–1586), took part in that of Anne Boleyn, despite being married at the time to Alice Middleton, a stepdaughter and pupil of Sir Thomas More. Neither did family fortunes appear to suffer unduly as Giles's allegiance changed from Protestant Edward VI, who gave permission for the Park to be enlarged by a further 500 acres, to Catholic Mary and back to Protestant Elizabeth. His great grandson, yet another Giles (1572–1638), succeeded him and his subsequent marriage to Dorothy Cecil, granddaughter of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, must be considered a pinnacle of the family marriage alliances, as can be seen in the very fine tomb of Giles and Dorothy in All Saints Church, Horseheath. Their son, William (1610–1648), inherited on his father's death and was created 1st Lord Alington of Killard, Co. Cork, in 1642. The family were Royalist supporters during the Civil War, although not apparently involved in any of the fighting. Nor do they seem to have suffered financially, which may have been a consequence of William's early death and the youth of the heir, Giles. Giles died in 1659 and was then succeeded by his younger brother, William, as 3rd Lord Alington (biographical information on the Alington family from Parsons 1948).

### The building of the new Hall

William was probably in his twenties, maybe even younger, when he came into his inheritance (his actual birth date is uncertain). The restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 brought a new degree of optimism to families like the Alingtons. There was the prospect of stability after years of turmoil and this gave the confidence to provide something tangible for future generations. This may well have been one of the reasons that influenced William's decision to

build a new house at Horseheath as in 1662 his wife, Catherine, was expecting their first child. Catherine Parsons suggests that the old Hall may well have become dilapidated, either in his father's time during the Civil War or perhaps even earlier when his grandfather had borrowed money following a hefty fine imposed for marrying his half-sister's daughter. In a poor state or not, the old Hall would not have seemed modern or fashionable to someone such as William, who had travelled in Europe and completed his education in Italy. Like many English travellers of the time, he must have absorbed and been impressed by the different styles of architecture he encountered. He knew Sir Thomas Chicheley, who was completing his own 'extraordinary curious neat house' at Wimpole and back in London he moved in circles that included John Evelyn, with his keen interest in architecture and gardens, and the up and coming gentleman-architect, Roger Pratt (also a friend of Chicheley), both of whom had also spent some time in Europe.

Horseheath Hall was one of only five houses definitely known to have been designed by Roger Pratt (1620–1685) – the other four being Coleshill in Berkshire (1657/8, destroyed by fire 1952), Kingston Lacy in Dorset (1663, much altered in the eighteenth century and again by Charles Barry in the nineteenth), Clarendon House in London (1664, demolished in 1683 after the fall from favour of its owner, Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon) and Ryston Hall, his own home, in Norfolk (1669, re-modelled extensively by Sir John Soane in the late eighteenth century). Pratt was born in Buckinghamshire and originally studied law but on inheriting money from his father he left England in 1643 to avoid the turmoil of the Civil War and to 'give myself some convenient education' (Gunther 1928, 3). He spent the next six and a half years travelling in Europe. In Rome he met John Evelyn, his contemporary, who may well have encouraged his growing interest in architecture. There was no formal way of qualifying as an architect at the time – houses were usually designed from pattern books and built by skilled craftsmen, so on his return to London he started collecting the standard architectural books of the day and devoted himself to their study. Palladio, Scamozzi and Serlio were just three authors that he considered were amongst the best (*ibid.* 1928, 60). The chance to put study into practice was given to Pratt by his cousin, Sir George Pratt, at his Berkshire home, Coleshill.

For many years, Coleshill was considered to be the work of Inigo Jones (whose work was much admired by Pratt) or his pupil, John Webb. It was not until 1928, when R T Gunther transcribed, edited and published Roger Pratt's notebooks, that the extent of his work became more widely recognised, although Catherine Parsons was well aware of this as the Pratt family had lent her a notebook on Horseheath as early as 1909. While Gunther's work clarified Pratt's involvement at Coleshill, subsequent work has untangled some of the confusion about the date of its building. Originally thought to be in the early 1650s,

it now seems more likely that building began somewhere between 1657 and 1658 and was completed by 1662 (Silcox-Crowe 1985, 7). Coleshill was where Pratt honed his architectural skills and learnt the technicalities of construction. It was the model from which he developed his theories on architecture and used in his following commissions – one of the next being Horseheath Hall.

Architecture, Pratt wrote, is ‘an art teaching us to build as we ought, both in regard to the person for whom the building is made, as also for the use for which it is chiefly intended’ (Gunther 1928, 18). He was adamant that a house should be both appropriate to the status of the owner and within their financial means. So Horseheath, built for a peer, was larger than Coleshill and Kingston Lacy, both for knights; Clarendon House, for Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde, was positively palatial while his own home at Ryston was comparatively modest in size. According to John Evelyn, who visited Horseheath in 1670, the Hall cost ‘little less than £20,000’ (*ibid.* 118). By contrast, Clarendon House was said to have cost more than £50,000 (the original estimate was £18,000) and Ryston just £2,800 (*ibid.* 137: 14). William Alington seems to have had no trouble finding the money to pay for his new house. He held no public office until he inherited the title – the profits from which were a common way of funding such projects – but he did have a large landed estate spread over at least three counties, which must have provided a reasonable income. He did sell a small estate at Milden in Suffolk in 1664, so he may well have sold others to provide some capital (pers. comm. Christopher Hawkins, The Hall, Milden).

The site for the new Hall at Horseheath certainly conformed to Pratt’s ideal – one reason for believing it was specifically chosen. It was on top of gently rising land and was set in the middle of existing parkland. Height, Pratt thought, would not only provide a pleasing aspect but would also give a dry site and allow better drainage from ‘all sinks and the like’, while a surround of permanent green pasture was always more attractive than one of arable fields (Gunther 1928, 55). The site also allowed for the preferred north/south orientation of the house which would avoid ‘troublesomeness of the sun’ (*ibid.* 27). Pratt was not in favour of patching up or extending an existing property – another reason for thinking that Horseheath was a completely new build – as this would not only cost more in the long run but would give an unattractive, irregular outer appearance and an interior of ‘little convenience’ with low ceilings and uneven floor levels (*ibid.* 61).

Roger Pratt’s favoured form for a house was the ‘double pile’ with rooms back to back in what he called a ‘square oblong’. This was not only a more economic use of space and materials but also meant the building would be warmer in winter and cooler in summer – an improvement on the more traditional ‘single pile’ house around a courtyard. The principal access and reception area was on the first floor and reached by a short flight of steps because, Pratt said,

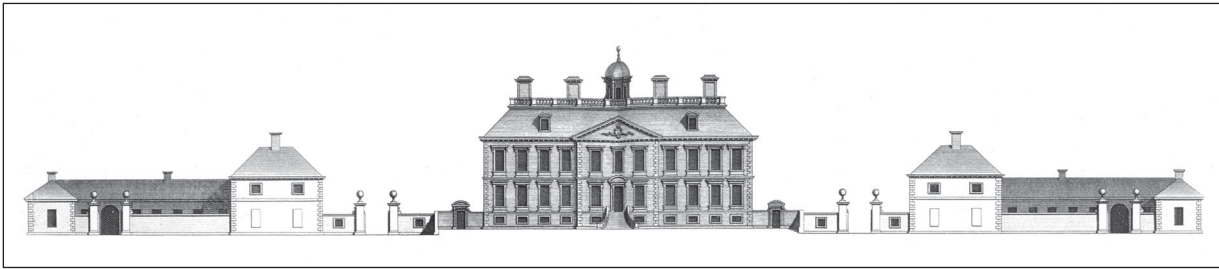
an ‘ascent to a house is more graceful than a plane’ and it was pleasanter for the occupants to be able to see over ‘out-walls’. It also avoided the problems involved in digging out cellars. The working quarters for the servants were relegated to a half-sunk basement and back staircases allowed them to go about their business without being seen or heard. It was this new idea of the separation of family from servants, of more privacy – a move away from the medieval ideas of inclusivity and mutual dependence – that has subsequently come to be characterised as the ‘upstairs/downstairs’ division of English country house life.

The earliest mention in Pratt’s notebooks that may relate to a new building at Horseheath, probably some sort of preliminary discussions, was in November 1662. The death of William Alington’s wife Catherine and baby daughter following childbirth in December of that year did not seemingly delay work as the foundation for the new Hall was laid on 13th June 1663 (Gunther 1928, 115). The house was built in red brick, possibly made on site or in the immediate locality (there was a small brickyard in the adjacent parish of West Wickham in the eighteenth century and several brickyards in nearby Haverhill in the nineteenth), with cream-coloured Ketton stone for base, quoins and cornice. It consisted of two main storeys which were equal in height and it was 144 feet wide in eleven bays (Coleshill and Kingston Lacy were only nine) and 76 feet deep. The three central bays protruded slightly and the front had a triangular pediment displaying the Alington coat of arms in stone. The slated roof was hipped with dormer windows (all windows were casements) and a flat, lead-covered top surrounded by a balustrade. This was in preference to a gabled roof which would use too much expensive lead. The staircase to this platform ended in an octagonal cupola, glazed and with seats ‘to be made use of ... when the weather is windy or wet’ (*ibid.* 69). At Horseheath, this was topped by a large gilded copper ball which had been brought back as a souvenir from the siege of Boulogne in 1544 by an Alington ancestor.

The only illustration which appears to show the house in its original form is the engraving by Colen Campbell in volume three of his *Vitruvius Britannicus* (Campbell 1725) (Fig. 1). There is a watercolour by Richard Relhan (c. 1782–1844), which is often reproduced because being coloured it gives a good impression of what the house actually looked like (Plate 5, and Fig. 2). However, Relhan was only about twelve years old when the Hall was demolished and he undoubtedly used Campbell as his source (Cambridge University Library Maps Relhan Collection). Campbell also included a plan of the first or principal storey which provides virtually the only information on the internal layout. However, with Pratt’s notes and the plan of Coleshill in Gunther’s book along with a reconstruction of the original floor plan of Kingston Lacy by the National Trust and some eye witness descriptions, it is possible to get some idea of what this looked like (The National Trust 1994).

The entrance hall was 40 feet wide, 48 feet deep





Above: **Figure 1.** Elevation of Horseheath Hall from Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* vol III 1725.

Below: **Figure 2.** Horseheath Hall Richard Relhan after Colen Campbell Watercolour 26.5cm x 18.7cm Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library Ms Views Relhan.2. See Plate 5.



and two storeys high with a gallery either at one end or around it (descriptions vary) accessed at second floor level. The first room on the left of the hall was a chapel. This appears to be the only Pratt house which included one, so may have been at the particular request of William Alington – there was a chapel in the old Hall. The main staircase was to the left of the hall in the centre of the building with a smaller back staircase immediately opposite on the right. The latter was not only for the use of servants but also for the convenience of ‘gentlemen who alight in ye stable yard...’, who want to ‘see their horses or to goe about their private occasions...’ (Gunther 1928, 125). The hall led into a great parlour, also 40 feet wide and 25 feet deep. These two rooms would have been public spaces used for entertaining. The great parlour had a central doorway out to a terrace with steps down to the gardens. The central alignment was deliberate as Pratt wanted a through view to the wider landscape from front to back and vice versa. The corners of the house had smaller rooms, 21 feet square, to be used as private parlours and bedrooms. These had closets off them, some of which were for the use of personal servants. All these rooms had two doorways which meant

they could interconnect if required and be flexible in use (Fig. 3). Judging from surviving photographs of Coleshill (the only Pratt house to remain unaltered) the interior would have been richly decorated with much very fine plasterwork similar in style to the work of Inigo Jones (Worsley 2002, 112–15). The hall ceiling at Horseheath was actually likened to that of Jones’s Banqueting House in Whitehall (Parsons 1948, 32).

The second floor mirrored the first in plan with a dining room above the great parlour and smaller rooms around. The third floor or garret housed the servants. Care was to be taken to avoid placing their sleeping quarters above guest bedrooms to minimise noisy disturbance and Pratt suggested this particular area could be used for the quieter (and practical) occupation of drying washing (Gunther 1928, 64). All other services were in the half-basement. These included kitchen, scullery, pantry, larder, dairy, still room, store rooms, housekeeper’s room and servants’ hall and were arranged either side of a central passage. A door at one end led to a courtyard containing the ‘out-offices’ – not near enough to be offensive – while the opposite end gave access to the stable courtyard.

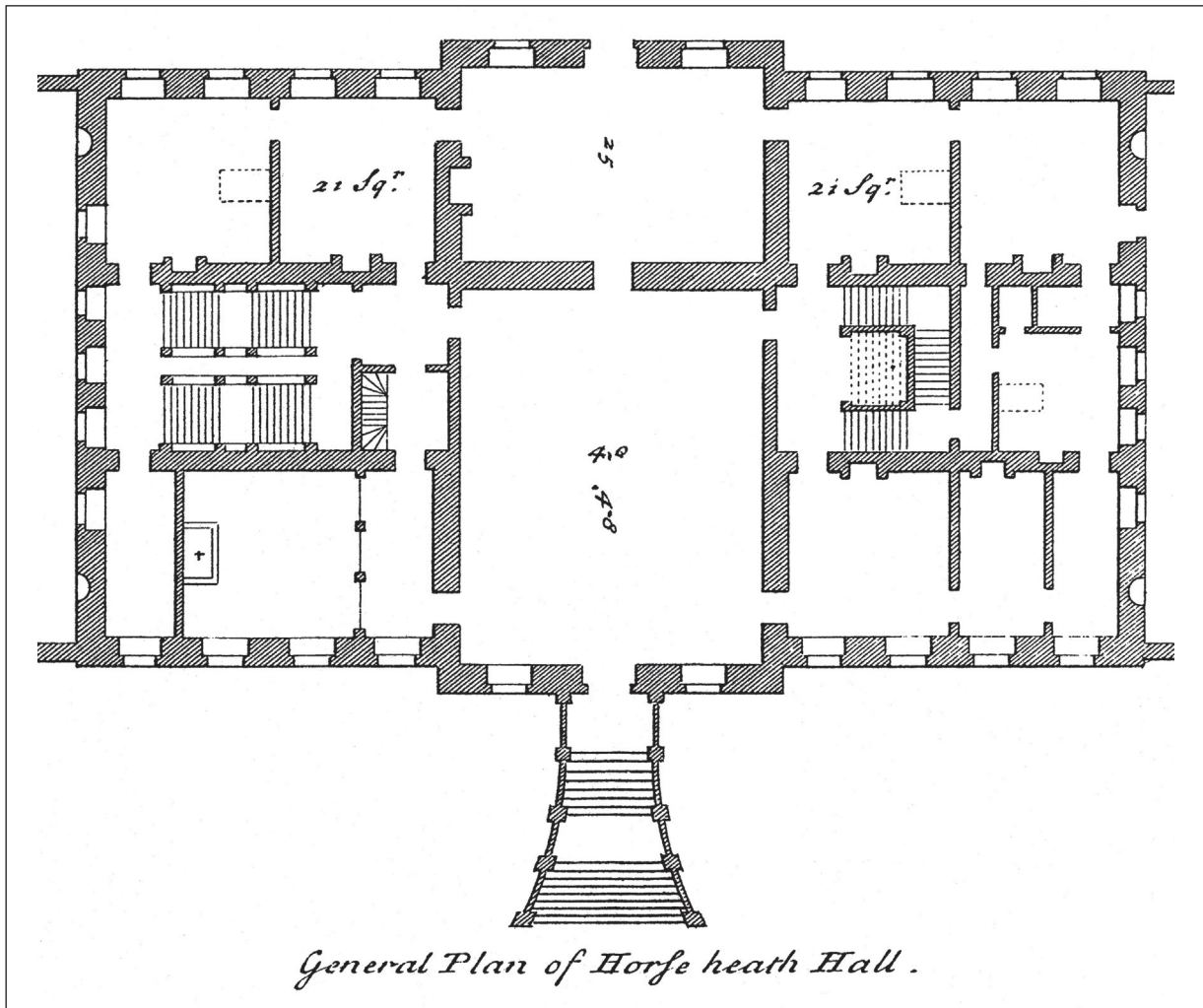


Figure 3. Plan of the first or principal story from Vitruvius Britannicus.

Roger Pratt's notebooks are full of memos to himself about the appropriate and efficient use of materials, structural considerations and the practicalities involved in building a house. He was also concerned about providing comfort and convenience for the occupiers and those who worked for them. Many of his ideas have resonance today. For example, there were to be no thresholds between rooms so that there would be aesthetic continuity throughout, and rain-water was to be taken from the roof through internal pipes to the offices in the basement where it was to be used to flush sewers. Extended handles to enable 'women and short folk' to reach window fastenings were another practical suggestion. He advised against employing workmen by the day as they 'will make small haste to finish the building', warned that they were likely to break or evade the terms of the contract if they could, and advocated regular supervision by the architect to ensure building work went according to plan (Gunther 1928, 87, 83).

The main construction of the house seems to have been completed in about two years and work would

then have presumably begun on the grounds and gardens. Roger Pratt thought that 'the way to the house' should be bordered by hedges or trees, preferably lime trees for the 'sweetness and beauty of their flowers and broad leaves' (*ibid.* 55). John Evelyn certainly described Horseheath as having 'a stately avenue'. This implication, that the trees were already mature, led Catherine Parsons to conclude that the site of the new Hall respected the old (Parsons 1948, 14). Pratt was certainly keen to retain any such existing feature but this does not necessarily mean the new Hall directly replaced the old, as avenues of trees spreading out into parkland had been a feature in East Anglia since the sixteenth century (Williamson 2006, 137). Alternatively, Evelyn could simply have been describing how he imagined a newly planted avenue would look once fully grown. According to Catherine Parsons, the avenue of trees, actually elm in this case, was at least a mile long extending west from the Hall through Horseheath village to join the Haverhill to Cambridge road. Six trees which may have been part of this avenue are shown at the edge of the Park on

an estate plan of 1769/70 – most of the avenue had been removed in earlier landscaping – and older Horseheath residents told her that they remembered several other elm trees still standing along the line of the avenue (Parsons 1948, 31). As late as the 1950s, the route of the avenue could apparently still be seen as soil marks in the arable field which had formerly been the Park.

Roger Pratt saw the house and its gardens as integral and had firm ideas on how gardens should be laid out. He favoured the then fashionable formal (or ‘ordered’ as he called it) style of garden which both he and William Alington would have become familiar with on their European travels. These consisted of separate walled gardens (again giving privacy) with gravelled walks surrounding grass squares or plats. He advocated a walled forecourt wider than the house frontage which was to have ‘transparent’ gates giving views of the wider landscape (Gunther 1928, 25–6). Something similar, complete with grass plats and gravelled walks, can be seen in a contemporary painting of Ryston Hall (Williamson 2006, Fig. 6.14). At Horseheath the land falls away quite sharply on the front or west side and it is not clear whether this forecourt was actually built – there are no contemporary plans or illustrations and no archaeological evidence has been found to date – but Pratt did leave notes of designs for various gate piers for Horseheath which may have been for this forecourt (Gunther 1928, 129–30). These gate piers could equally have been for the gardens to the rear of the Hall (or for both). An archaeological survey of the site in 1990, prior to the whole area being re-landscaped, revealed the lines of a rectilinear garden with a large central compartment flanked on either side by smaller rectangular compartments, presumed to be wall foundations. These in turn seem to have been sub-divided into smaller areas (Cocroft 1999, 111–12). Interestingly, the survey also revealed two curving brick spreads in the central compartment, possibly indicating some sort of internal divisions or paths and very reminiscent in design to the plan of the garden at Ryston reconstructed by Gunther (1928, 178).

When it comes to the actual planting within the walled gardens, there is little information. Roger Pratt did order a vast quantity of fruit trees for Horseheath from the well-known nursery of Captain Leonard Gurle in Whitechapel. There were ten varieties of plums, seven of grapes, four of pears, an incredible thirty-four of peaches, five of nectarines, five of apricots and three of figs. Some of these may have been for orchard planting but the majority would have been for training on the many walls (Parsons 1948, 16–17). This was a new technique introduced from France in the late seventeenth century which enabled the fruit to gain protection from the sun-warmed walls and therefore ripen better (Quest-Ritson 2001, 71). There is no record of any shrubs or flowers for Horseheath but at Ryston Pratt grew honeysuckle, jasmine, red and white roses and pinks (Gunther 1928, 306–7). Sir Thomas Sclater, who was a neighbour of the Alingtons at Catley Park in Linton, made notes of

his gardening activities in the 1670s (Cambridgeshire Archives R/59/5/3/1 50–2). He, too, had walled gardens with grass plats and gravel walks and recorded growing laurels, Spanish broom, primroses and stocks in addition to roses. Both Pratt at Ryston and Sclater at Linton also grew orchard fruit (both were customers of Gurle) along with gooseberries, currants, strawberries and raspberries. The soft fruit may well have been grown with vegetables in a separate kitchen garden, for both Pratt and Sclater left records of vegetables grown while Sclater actually mentions a kitchen garden. The garden would obviously have taken time to develop but in June 1666, Roger Pratt stood William Alington a ‘treat’ to mark the end of the construction works (Gunther 1928, 117).

### The end of an era and the new owners

William Alington had married his second wife, Juliana, in 1664 and a daughter, also called Juliana, was baptised at Horseheath in 1665. A son and heir was born at the new Hall in 1667 but he died soon after to be immediately followed by his young mother. William was very affected by this tragedy; he became ill and then spent some considerable time in France leaving his brother Hildebrand to keep an eye on the Horseheath estate. He seems to have had no heart for another marriage, writing to Hildebrand ‘you must look yourself out a right companion unless you have a mind our family will die out with us’ (Parsons 1948, 19). Nevertheless, he did marry again some eight years later. There were three surviving children from this marriage of William and Diana – two daughters and the longed-for heir, Giles, born in 1680. William was not to enjoy his son for long as he died suddenly in 1684 at the Tower of London, where he was then Governor (William had received an English peerage in 1682 and become Baron of Wymondley after his Hertfordshire property). Lady Alington was left, as the guardian appointed by her late husband, to manage the estate on behalf of her three very young children plus her nineteen year old step-daughter and make provision for their future. Unfortunately, Giles died at Eton in 1691, aged eleven. At some stage his mother appears to have given an extremely long lease (999 years) for the Horseheath estate to John Bromley leaving her brother-in-law, Hildebrand, who succeeded as 5th Lord Alington, virtually no option but to sell it to him. Hildebrand, who remained unmarried, retained part of the estate in Withersfield parish, across the county boundary in Suffolk, but the sale of the Hall and main estate in 1700 (by now covering virtually the whole of the adjoining parish of West Wickham as well as the parish of Horseheath) effectively ended an Alington family connection with Horseheath that had lasted for some three hundred years.

John Bromley’s origins are obscure although he did later claim connection with the Bromley family of Hertfordshire. He was born about 1652 and made a considerable fortune as a sugar plantation owner in



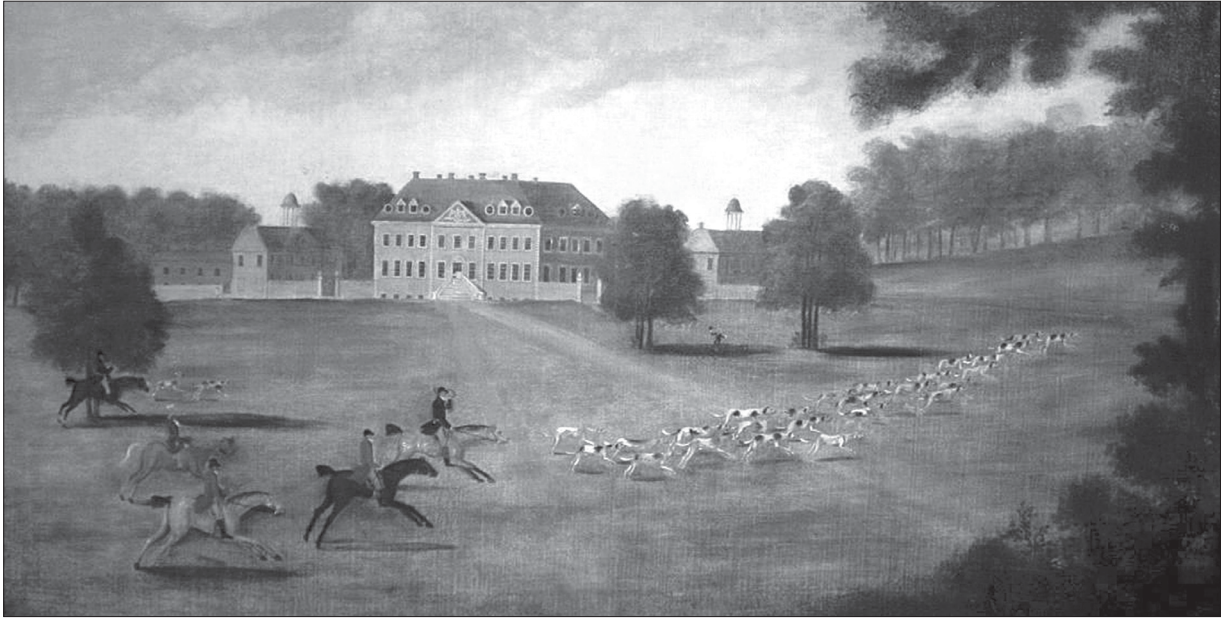
Barbados where he was also a member of the Supreme Council. Like others in his position, he seems to have returned to England with the intention of using his money to buy a country estate and benefit from the social and political advantages that would bring. He bought Horseheath for £42,000 and then apparently laid out another £30,000 on the estate (Hayton 2002). No details of how this was spent have survived but some money must have been used for the usual redecoration and refurbishment that accompanies any house sale. In 1670 John Evelyn had described the house as having unspecified 'infirmities' so these may have had to have been addressed as well (Parsons 1948, 14). In addition, although the Hall was only just over thirty years old, it may have been little occupied during the minority of the Alington heir and after his death (the Alingtons also had a London house) resulting in some dilapidation. It could be that the two symmetrical service building wings on either side of the Hall, seen in the Colen Campbell illustration of 1725, were built at this time. Most commentators have assumed that these were part of the original Pratt design but he left no notes about these (although he did mention stables), there was nothing remotely similar at any of his other houses and this would seem to be a feature not favoured anyway until the late seventeenth century (Girouard 1978, 151). This type of major building project would certainly have accorded with John Bromley's ambition to establish his credentials as a country gentleman, something he accomplished with remarkable speed, being made Deputy Lieutenant of the county in 1701, a JP the following year, High Sheriff in 1704 and MP for the county in 1705. John died in 1707 and was succeeded by his son, also called John.

John, the younger, was twenty five years old when he inherited, also succeeding his father as MP for the county. He was born in Barbados but completed his education at Clare College, Cambridge, before marrying Mercy, the daughter of William Bromley of Holt Castle in Worcestershire (any family connection is unclear). This marriage eventually brought John additional estates in both that county and Shropshire. Just a year after their marriage, Mercy died following the birth of a son, Henry, in 1705. Henry was only thirteen and a pupil at Eton when his father died in 1718, aged just thirty six. John, too, appears to have spent money extensively on the house and grounds at Horseheath. In his will, dated the 16th October 1718, he asked that his son with his other executors should complete 'the buildings which I have begun to erect at Horseheath Hall ... according to my first design' and that 'the Gardens shall likewise be finished according to the Plans which I have already proposed' unless this could be done in a better way. He also instructed that if the money for this could not be found from the income of the Horseheath estate, it was to come from the Barbados estates instead (The National Archives PROB 11/566/247). Again there is no indication of what exactly the proposals entailed or indeed whether his wishes were carried out, although it is possible that the service wings actually date from this period

rather than that of his father. What is clear is that, once he had come of age and gained control of financial matters, Henry Bromley spent considerable sums on Horseheath Hall, both internally and externally.

After Eton, Henry attended Clare College, like his father before him. He became (Whig) MP for the county in 1727 and married Frances Wyndham a year later. A daughter, Frances, was born in 1728 followed in 1733 by a son, Thomas. As was all too familiar in the story of Horseheath Hall, Frances died after the birth of their son. Henry did not marry again although he had at least one mistress (Palmer 1935, 154). In the words of Catherine Parsons, Henry 'lived at the Hall in the highest style of elegance and grandeur' and 'entertained on a large and lavish scale' (Parsons 1948, 32). The engraver and antiquary, George Vertue (1684–1756), noted that Henry had 'fitted up and furnished ... the rooms in an elegant and modern taste' along with replacing all the casement windows with sashes and plate glass, the deal doors with ones of the comparatively recently introduced mahogany and the slate-tiled roof with one of lead (Cambs Archives R97/12 Box 3 Horseheath notes Vol 1a, 57 – this is actually a transcription from William Cole's papers British Library Add Ms 5868). A painting of Horseheath Hall attributed to John Inigo Richards (1731–1810) which has recently come to light (Pl. 6, Fig. 4) shows that the roof was probably raised at this time, more dormer windows inserted and the cupola removed (private collection). In 1748, Henry gave 'two handsome Doric fluted Pillars ... just been taken down out of an upper bedchamber at Horseheath Hall ... which were too heavy ornaments for a private chamber' to All Saints Church in Cambridge, for use as an altar piece (Palmer 1935, 123). The antiquarian clergyman, William Cole (1714–1782), a lifelong friend of Henry who had known Horseheath Hall from boyhood, since his stepmother was related to the Bromleys (Parsons 1930), described how the chapel was converted into a new dining room and a drawing room created from two smaller rooms. The latter contained a fine fireplace of white and black marble supported by yellow marble pillars designed by William Kent (c. 1686–1748). The library housing Henry's notable collection of books 'in elegant cases', much appreciated by Cole, had two similar fireplaces also undoubtedly to Kent's design (Parsons 1948, 40). As well as being employed in this refurbishment of the interior, Kent was almost certainly involved with the re-landscaping of the gardens and park at Horseheath.

In 1733 Henry Bromley donated a pair of unwanted wrought iron gates to Trinity College, Cambridge, which may be an early indication that he was doing away with the formal, enclosed walled gardens of Roger Pratt. According to George Vertue, Henry also cut down the elm avenue to the west of the house replacing it with a new sweeping entrance drive from the Cambridge road which passed in front of the house and on to another gate in the hamlet of Streetly End, nearer to Newmarket and the racing. The Horseheath to Withersfield section of the main road was moved to form the Park boundary (Cambs



*Figure 4.* A painting of Horseheath Hall attributed to John Inigo Richards (1731–1810) which has recently come to light. See Plate 6.

Archives R97/12 Box 3 Horseheath notes Vol 1a, 57). It is not known whether Kent was actually involved in these changes but they do accord with his ideas about a more natural flow between garden and countryside; in Horace Walpole's famous description Kent 'leapt the fence and saw all Nature as a garden' (Harris 2004, 13) and it was about this time that he became increasingly active in re-designing gardens including Stowe, Claremont, Holkham, and Rousham (*ibid.* 12). Henry Bromley would no doubt have been very aware of all this and Kent's style would have appealed to him. Kent is said to have been influenced by the paintings of Claude Lorraine (1604/5–1682) which depict pastoral scenes of the countryside around Rome, many of which include classical buildings. There was at least one Claude painting in Henry's extensive collection along with other landscapes by contemporary artists such as Nicolas Poussin and Salvator Rosa (Parsons 1948, 37–40). The clearest evidence of Kent's work for Horseheath is dated 1746 and is indeed a surviving design for a classical garden building, an octagonal grotto pavilion on a rustic arched base (Dixon Hunt 1987, 170). This building was to be sited on an oval shaped pond – a typical Kent feature – known as Acre Pond and a small mound, which may have formed the base of the grotto, was recorded during the 1990 archaeological investigations (Cocroft 1999, 112). There are other distinct Kent hallmarks to be seen in the 1769/70 estate plan. Small groves or clumps of trees are scattered throughout the Park, some framing a view of Horseheath church tower, while to the east of the house, the formal walled gardens have been swept away with a ha-ha providing a seamless boundary between lawn and the Park beyond (CUL Maps Ms Plans a 27). It has also been suggested that the most important Kent contributions to the Park

landscape could be the wilderness area with its serpentine paths and summer house in Hare Wood to the north of the Hall along with a smaller wilderness area nearer the house on the south (Mowl & Mayer 2013, 110). Another Kent favourite – the cedar of Lebanon, then a recent introduction, can still be seen on the site of the Hall today.

George Vertue was told 'on the best authority' that altogether Henry spent £100,000 on improvements to the house and gardens (Cambs Archives R97/12 Box 3 Horseheath notes Vol 1a, 57). He apparently paid a similar sum on supporting the Whig cause in Cambridgeshire even after he was elevated to the peerage in 1741 as Baron Montfort (the title was taken from his Shropshire estate inherited through his mother). Ostensibly, his peerage was for services to the county but in reality it was a 'cash for honours' transaction, George II, being in need of money to placate his mistress (Sedgwick 1970, 1). Unfortunately, as well as being a very extravagant spender, Henry was also a compulsive gambler – horses, cards and wagers on just about anything – but despite being, as Horace Walpole described 'the sharpest genius of his time' at this, his lifestyle was unsustainable (Cunningham 1861, Vol II, 416). On New Year's Day 1755, after an evening of cards at his club, Henry returned to his London home, drew up his will with his lawyer, went in to the adjoining room and shot himself. As Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) wrote 'he had a true Epicurean character, loved a degree of voluptuousness that his fortune could not afford, and a splendour of life it could not supply' (Sotheby's 1994, 60).



### The last years

Henry Bromley left behind debts amounting to some £30,000 and an estate badly in need of some attention (Sedgwick 1970, 2). It would appear that he had not spent much on repairs and routine maintenance in later years. His heir, twenty two year old Thomas, 2nd Lord Montfort, lost little time in asking the Prime Minister, the 1st Duke of Newcastle, for financial help and in 1756 he was given a government pension of £800 (Brooke 1964). Many years later and after Thomas's death in 1799 his son was to be awarded a similar pension 'in consequence of narrow circumstances' (*The Times* 5/10/1838). Thomas was a rather dissolute and irresponsible young man with an acknowledged son by his mistress (although this was accepted practice for an unmarried man at this time; the Rev William Cole seemingly was unconcerned). He was as extravagant a spender as his father had been, although perhaps not with quite the same compulsive gambling habit. Like his father, he continued to financially support the Whig cause in the county (his brother-in-law, Charles Cadogan, was MP for Cambridge from 1755 to 1776) and succeeded his father as the High Steward for Cambridge, a largely ceremonial post. In this capacity he regularly entertained the Mayor and Corporation at the Guildhall, attended the opening of Stourbridge Fair and held an annual ball for three hundred guests at Horseheath Hall. He particularly seems to have relished being an officer in the Cambridgeshire Militia, founded in 1759, rising to the rank of colonel (Parsons 1948, 35–36). However, the bad influence of the other officers was seen as contributing to the frequent alcohol-fuelled bouts of anti-social behaviour which were often the despair of those like his father's old friend, William Cole, who recognised that Thomas actually did have some 'excellent parts and capacity' (Lewis 1937 Vol 1, 237).

In addition to his government pension, Thomas received nearly £3000 a year from farm rentals on his Horseheath estate. In 1761 he sold his Shropshire estate for £70,000 and his property in Worcestershire (Holt Castle) was sold by 1764. The Barbados sugar plantation had already gone under Henry (Bowen 2004; *Victoria County History*, Worcestershire 1913, Vol 3 401–8). In 1767 he borrowed £48,000 at 5% interest at about the same time that he bought Catley Park in Linton. By April 1768, William Cole was hearing rumours that Thomas could not pay for this and it was subsequently resold to Edmund Keene, the Bishop of Ely. Financial problems did not prevent the annual ball at Horseheath that year at which Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, his wife and daughters, were the principal guests; possibly because Thomas had just mortgaged the estate for £32,000. By November, Cole was being told that Thomas was not paying his labourers and tradesmen and that Horseheath Hall might have to be sold to pay debts (Stokes 1933, 35, 99, 100, 112).

Thomas did spend considerable amounts of money on Horseheath but while Henry, with his library,

painting collection and employment of the fashionable interior and landscape designer, William Kent, had been something of a connoisseur in his tastes, Thomas was more obviously ostentatious in his additions. In 1762 a large glasshouse or orangery costing £1,300 was built to the north of the house containing 150 orange trees costing one guinea each. This was on the site of the bowling green, which may have been an original feature in the garden as they were a popular garden feature in the seventeenth century (Jacques 2001, 371). Beyond this in Hare Wood, there was a fashionable menagerie certainly housing exotic birds and possibly monkeys (as a child, Catherine Parsons was regaled with 'handed-down' stories of monkeys riding horses). The estate plan of 1769/70, probably drawn up in relation to the mortgage, shows that the south range had been enlarged since Colen Campbell's plan of 1725 and that the Park had other typical eighteenth century garden features such as a cold bath and an ice house, although it is not clear whether these were built under Thomas or his father (Fig. 5).

In March 1772, Thomas made 'an imprudent and unreasonable' marriage, which according to Cole just hastened the inevitable (Parsons 1948, 42). Mary Ann Blake, sister of the MP for Sudbury, Sir Patrick Blake, was just twenty one years of age (Thomas eighteen years her senior) and an heiress in her own right with a fortune, according to Cole, of £12,000. In a letter to his long-time correspondent, Horace Walpole, Cole expressed surprise that any 'woman of fashion' would take such a step, particularly one knowing Thomas's reputation as Mary did. He wished her every success and happiness but considered she would only have herself to blame if she was just marrying for a title and a fine house (Lewis 1937, Vol 1, 237). Cole's pessimism proved only too right. Marriage does not seem to have steadied Thomas or indeed Mary. A year later, Cole was reporting to Walpole that he had been forced to cut short a stay and leave their London house because Thomas and Mary liked to stay up until the early hours of the morning making him feel obliged to stay up too, even when he was feeling unwell. On one occasion they had woken him up on returning from a masquerade ball at four o'clock in the morning and taken him off on a trip to Ealing and back despite the fact 'that her Ladyship was on the eve of falling to pieces'; their son and heir, Henry, was born a couple of weeks later on 14 May 1773 (*ibid.* 363).

According to Cole, Thomas did not visit Horseheath after 1774 (Lewis 1937 Vol 2, 115). Debts continued to mount including large interest payments on loans and mortgage. No one would lend money to him and rumours were rife about the possible sale of the Hall, particularly once the sale of the Hall's contents began to take place in May 1775 (Parsons 1948, 42, 43). An advertisement in the *Cambridge Chronicle* (3/6/1775, 3) for one of the first sales includes large quantities of wines, spirits and beer (35 hogsheads); many plants, shrubs and tender plants (such as orange and lemon trees, myrtles and jasmine) along with garden equip-

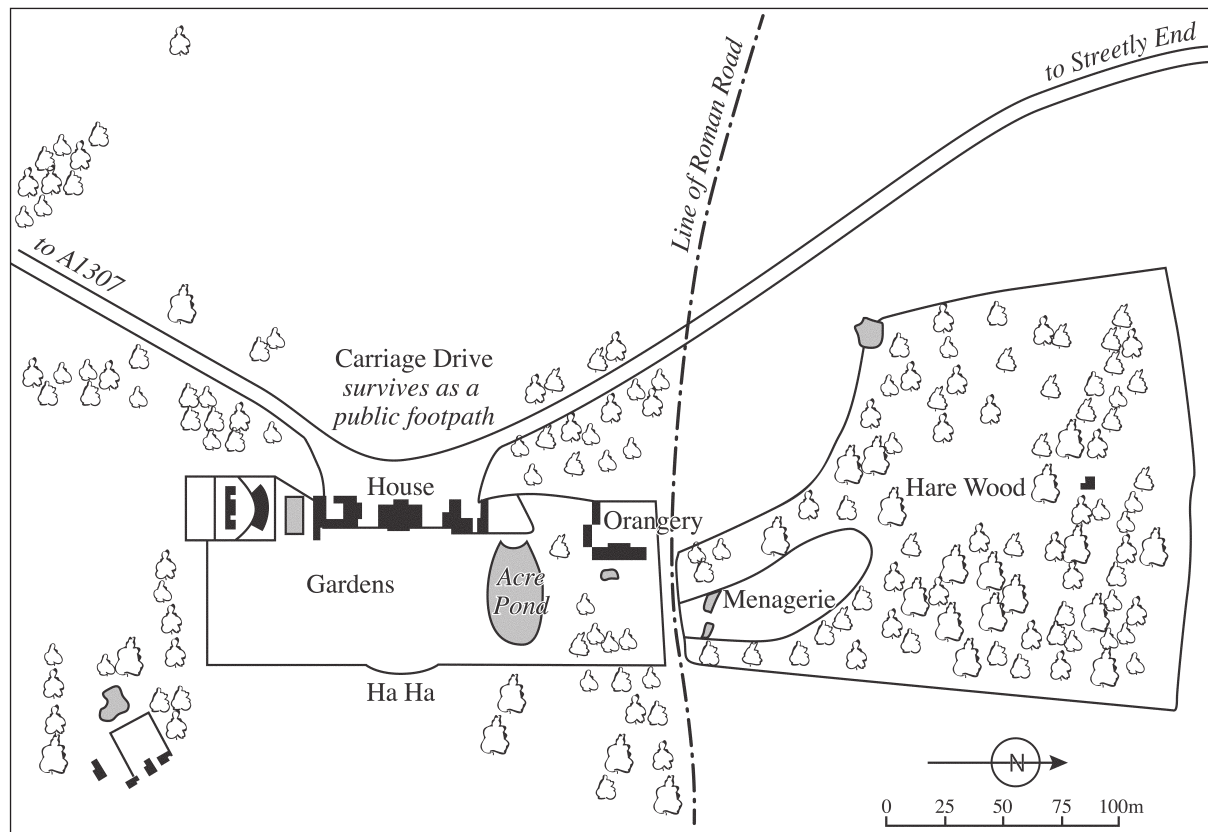


Figure 5. Plan of the Hall and its environs (after the estate map of 1769/70) showing the enlarged southern range and some of the 18th century garden features such as the orangery, Acre Pond and menagerie.

ment; a variety of foreign birds and their cages; a pack of hounds and other dogs and various kitchen contents. Furniture and paintings were reputedly being taken to London for sale – paintings were sold by Christie & Ansell in 1776 according to Cole (Lewis 1937, Vol 2, 57). Grazing was let in the Park (*Cambridge Chronicle* 26/9/1775) and then the Hall itself was advertised to let (with or without the Park) along with the ‘manors, pleasure grounds, gardens, hothouses and stables’ while the herd of ‘fine and beautiful coloured deer’ was offered for sale (*Cambridge Chronicle* 4/11/1775, 4).

The mortgagees would not apparently allow Thomas to sell off any of the timber from the estate to raise money. No one came forward to rent the Hall, which is not very surprising if it was true that it was ‘in a very ruinous condition’ and needed £40,000 of repairs and furnishings to put it in a tenable state (Parsons 1948, 42). In 1776 a Private Act of Parliament was obtained to allow trustees to sell, on Thomas’s behalf and without needing his consent, the whole estate, so that the proceeds could be used to fulfil the conditions of his marriage settlement, thus protecting his wife and heir, and to help pay off his many debts (1776 16 Geo3 c 111). The estate of nearly 5000 acres, covering several parishes in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, was auctioned in seventeen lots on 2nd June 1777. Lot 1, according to the sales catalogue, included the Park of 610 acres ‘the Lands in which

are most beautifully disposed by Nature’ and the enlarged southern range, which it was suggested, could be turned into a ‘Mansion House’ in its own right. Right from the start the intention was for the main house, together with the orangery, to be pulled down and sold in separate lots for the materials (Christie & Ansell 2/6/1777). The Earl of Hardwicke purchased six lots, all farms in West Wickham, for £35,000. This may have been at the auction or, more likely, in a subsequent private arrangement as a handwritten annotation of the agreement in the catalogue is dated the 24 July. Other unsold lots were re-offered for auction over six days in August along with fittings and other materials from the Hall and gardens (*Cambridge Chronicle* 16/8/1777, 4). These included inlaid chimney pieces, large quantities of wooden flooring, doors, shutters and window sashes; lead pipes and cisterns; bricks, tiles and slates; stone steps, balustrades and statuary and large iron gates and railings (*Cambridge Chronicle* 16/8/1777). The fate of Horseheath Hall was decided.

There is then a hiatus in the story. The remaining Horseheath estate was eventually bought in 1783 by Henry Batson, who already had an estate in Berkshire, but nothing seems to have been done about the standing buildings until 1792. On the 25th September in that year, Henry’s son, Stanlake, came to an agreement with Henry Tomlinson, a London plumber (a previously unidentified copy of this agree-

ment is in Cambs Archives R55/10/37 a). For the sum of £1000 down payment with £3000 more to be paid in instalments over the next four years, Tomlinson would acquire and be obliged to remove materials from the Hall, garden walls, greenhouses, hothouses and all the other outbuildings. He could only do this using the existing drive to the Cambridge road and was not to damage the parkland grass. Ownership of any materials left after four years would revert to Batson. The first sale notice appeared in November 'To Builders, Plumbers, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Stone-Masons, Smiths, Glaziers and Others'. All the materials from the Hall 'Now pulling down' were to be sold by private contract on the site. These included large quantities of lead and iron; oak timber; mahogany doors and batten floors; two statuary chimney pieces with Sienna columns (these sound very like William Kent's, perhaps no longer fashionable); stone coping, paving, vases and other ornaments; plate glass and 'all other building materials, too tedious to mention' (*Cambridge Chronicle* 17/11/1792). Two years later, Tomlinson was still selling materials including fifty tons of lead in one ton lots (*ibid.* 23/8/1794, 3 Fig. 6). On 27th February 1794, Charles Vancouver in his agricultural survey of Cambridgeshire noted that the farm houses and outbuildings of the Horseheath estate appeared in a ruinous condition and that the Hall 'a very elegant and modern building is now levelling with the ground' (Vancouver 1794).

#### Afterwards and what remains

Surprise is often expressed today that Horseheath Hall was demolished but this was not unusual for the time. For example, in neighbouring Hertfordshire the peak of loss of country houses was between 1790 and 1829 (Wilson & Mackley 2000, 226). One reason for this was the dilapidation of older houses through lack of regular use or maintenance. The Hall itself did have its critics and this may have played a part. Edmund Carter was typical when he commented that 'the two staircases on each side of the hall occupy such large

spaces, as to lessen the number of rooms one would expect to find from the outward grandeur of the building' (Carter 1753, 221). Simply, it was not grand or convenient enough and Stanlake Batson eventually built himself a new house (Horseheath Lodge) in a more modern style on a new site on the other side of the parish. For this, bricks were hauled from the Hall site and used to build the cellars and garden walls, so Henry Tomlinson cannot have cleared everything (Parsons 1948, 48).

Materials must also have been salvaged by people from the surrounding villages as both Catherine Parsons and William Palmer described how many of the smaller houses, cottages and barns in the area contained windows, doors, mantelpieces and carved wood from the Hall (Parsons 1948, 47; Palmer 1921, 20). If these still survive, their origins have now been lost over time. The exception is at the Mill House in the West Wickham hamlet of Streetly End. Its then owner, Daniel Taylor, who ran a tannery and maltings there, built himself a new house immediately adjacent and apparently entirely with materials bought from Horseheath Hall (Parsons 1948, 47). This house, known as Streetly End House or latterly The Red House, was demolished in the nineteen fifties, unfortunately just before notification was received of its listing (pers. comm K. Martin). Existing photographs show a red brick house with sash windows, a pediment doorway and a stone balustrade roof parapet (West Wickham & District Local History Club Hancock photos). The surviving Mill House (under the same ownership at the time of the demolition of the Red House) has many architectural pieces, undoubtedly from Horseheath Hall or via the Red House, in the house or grounds (Fig. 7). The Mount in nearby Haverhill reputedly had a staircase from the Hall. This house was demolished in the nineteen sixties, but photographs show a well made wooden staircase with turned spiral balusters. It does not perhaps look grand enough or the right style to have been a main staircase but could well have been a back staircase. However, almost next to the stairs can be seen a very fine doorway topped by a broken pedi-

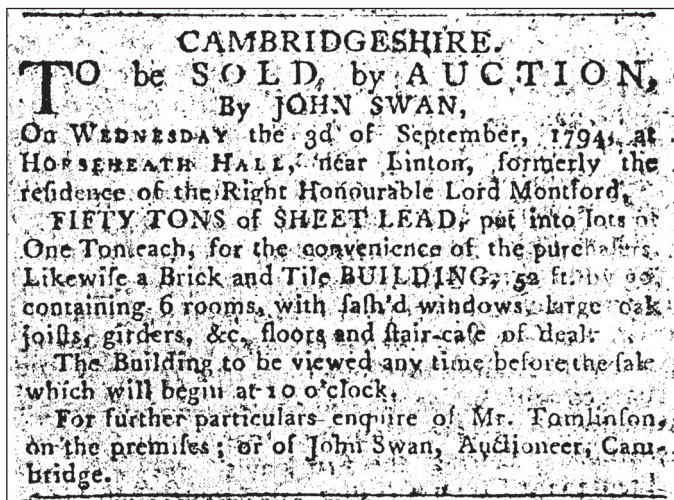


Figure 6. The last advertisement for the sale of materials from the Hall. *Cambridge Chronicle* 23/8/1794.





Figure 7. Architectural remains from Horseheath Hall in the garden of the Mill House, Streetly End.

ment which could very well have been from the Hall (Haverhill & District Local History Group, Fig.8).

Apart from the gate, mentioned above, given to Trinity College by Henry Bromley in 1733, there are two other known gates in existence. One is almost next to the Trinity gate at the southern entrance to the grounds of St John's College from Trinity Piece. In 1778 St John's paid £36.18.0 including carriage, not directly from a sale but via a third party, probably the Cambridge smith, Jonas Jackson junior (Boys Smith 1951, 29; Saunders 2005, 303). The other gate, by far the best, is at Glebe House, opposite the church in Cheveley. The copper ball from the siege of Boulogne, brought back as a souvenir by a member of the Alington family and placed on top of the Hall's cupola, was bought by the patron of the living of Naseby in Northamptonshire. Originally acquired for the value of the copper, it ended up on top of the rather stumpy church spire (Greenall 1974, 7:8). When the spire collapsed it seemingly stood outside the church for a while (Catherine Parsons believed it was in someone's garden) before being put on display inside where it is today. It has not been possible to trace the fate of the majority of paintings sold in 1776. These are only known from a list compiled by William Cole and his descriptions are rather vague along the lines of 'A Landscape by Nicholas Poussin' or 'Ruins by Pond' (Parsons 1948, 38–39). However, a *Landscape with Classical Ruins* by Pierre Patel (c. 1605–1676) previously owned by Lord Montfort was given to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1864. Some domestic silverware from the Hall has appeared in the sale room including a beautiful pair of silver soup tureens designed by William Kent for Henry Bromley in 1744 which sold at Sotheby's for a record sum of £1,013,500 in 1994 (*Daily Mail* 11/11/94).

The impact of the loss of the Hall on the local area is almost impossible to assess because of the lack of documentary sources. Estate records just do not appear to have survived. The Hall and Park must have employed local people (houses of this size could have anywhere between twenty and sixty staff at any one time) even if most would have been on a casual basis when the Hall was occupied. The estate farms were tenanted and simply passed to new owners so employment there was probably not directly affected. It may even have increased under a new efficient landlord such as Lord Hardwicke. Apart from formal donations, like the £100 Thomas Bromley gave for the poor of Horseheath on his marriage, there must have been 'perks' to be acquired, particularly with such a lax household (Parsons 1948, 41). A not too serious story told to Catherine Parsons was that Thomas could not go outside without tripping over a rope stretching to his steward's house which was being used to remove goods for his own use from the Hall (Parsons 1930, 27). The steward, Jeremiah Lagden, had started work for Thomas as his footboy at Eton and his mother, Emma, had once been housekeeper and mistress of his great uncle, William Bromley, so perhaps he felt he was well positioned to take advantage, but others may well have followed his example. The greatest impact would possibly have been more psychological, something akin to bereavement. The demolition of the Hall was a visible loss in the landscape – its elevated position meant it would have been clearly seen by all those living in the villages surrounding the Park – but there was also the personal loss of 'our Lord', 'our family'. Local people may not have approved of their behaviour, may have felt resentful of their wealth and unpaid debts, but they certainly would have enjoyed the excitement of having something to talk about, as



*Figure 8. Interior of The Mount, Haverhill, before it was demolished in the 1960s (Haverhill & District Local History Group).*

can be seen in the fact that Catherine Parsons was able to collect so many stories over a hundred years later.

What about the site today? Apart from a small length of earthworks on the west, there is no archaeological evidence for the Park boundary being embanked or ditched (Way 1997, 271). When Catherine Parsons was writing in 1948, the site of the Hall was owned by her brother and she described it as ‘a beauty spot in Cambridgeshire’ with its marshy pond (the Acre Pond) surrounded by orchids and other wild flowers. In the 1990’s the whole area was re-landscaped to create a small lake which, together with the enlargement of the Acre Pond, forms a wildlife refuge/fishing lake (for archaeological excavations relating to these see Cocroft 1999, Kemp 1999 and Fig. 9). The site is private property and not accessible to the public. However, the Roman Road or Wool Street crosses what was once the park and passes between the site of the Hall and Hare Wood from where the ditch that is all that remains of the ha-ha can be seen while a public footpath from the A1307 (the Cambridge to Haverhill road) to Streetly End still follows the line of the carriageway put in by Henry Bromley. It passes the site of the Hall, so it is possible to stand in front of where the house once was and admire the view of All Saints Church in Horseheath, much as its inhabitants could have done.

### Conclusion

The story of Horseheath Hall is not unusual in following the fortunes, both ups and downs, of its own-

ers and these were often governed by the times in which they lived. The Alington family developed their social, political and economic status over centuries by adroitly manoeuvring their way through troubled times. Their wealth was based on land and supported by political office. Horseheath Hall was built in more stable conditions with a view to the generations to come and in a new style derived from the travels abroad of both its builder, William Alington, and its architect, Roger Pratt. Pratt’s architecture was to prove highly influential in determining the design of the English country house for years to come, the best example today probably being Belton House in Lincolnshire. In comparison, the Bromley family made their fortune abroad and comparatively quickly producing a new commodity much in demand by an emerging consumer society back home. With their wealth secured, they returned to England to establish their social and political credentials through the purchase of a country estate. While the first two generations were intent on consolidating their position, the following ones were more interested in dissipating their wealth in a hedonistic lifestyle based on very conspicuous consumption.

A common thread ran through the ownership of Horseheath Hall and was influential in determining its short life – the lack of an heir or inheritance by a youthful heir. The dynastic ambitions of both families failed to materialise and Horseheath Hall ultimately became a victim. Its story sometimes sounds very much like a television costume drama but in a county with very few country houses of note, the loss of such an architecturally influential house as Horseheath Hall is very real and much to be regretted.



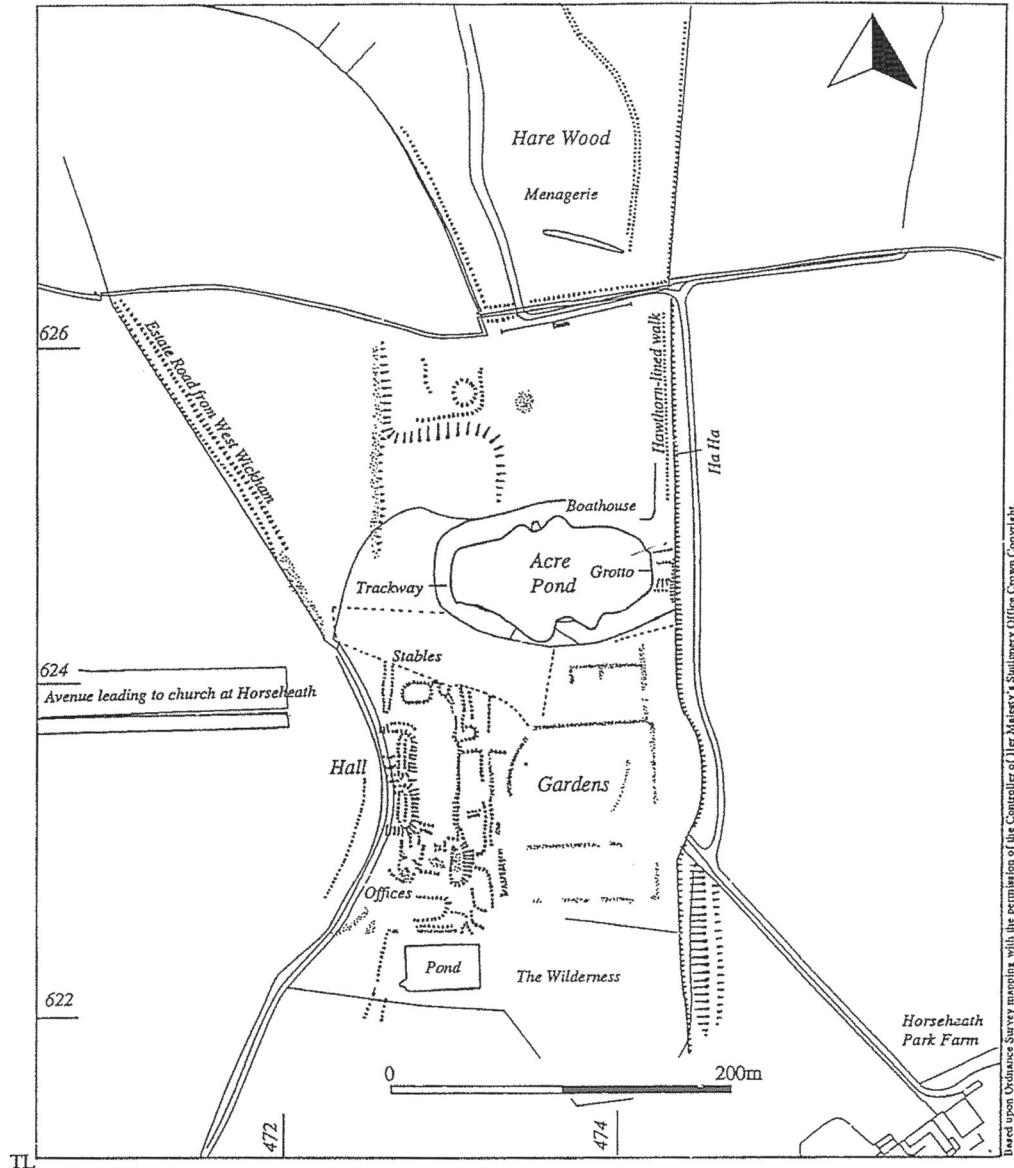


Figure 9. Plan showing the results of the 1990 RCHM survey of Horseheath Hall and its environs (after RCHM) reproduced in Kemp, S. N. 1999 with permission from Oxford Archaeology East.

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*Cambridge Chronicle, Daily Mail, The Times*

### ***Photographs***

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West Wickham and District Local History Club.